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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that second language instruction that aims to foster speaking skills and natural spoken interaction should be based upon the grammar of the spoken language, and not on grammars that reflect written norms. Using evidence from a corpus of conversational English, this examination focuses on how four grammatical features that occur with significant frequency are dealt with in currently popular pedagogical grammars. These include: (1) ellipsis; (2) left dislocation; (3) reinforcement; and (4) indirect speech. The investigation shows that the treatment of these selected features varies from adequate to non-existent in the grammars surveyed. Although research in discourse analysis does offer some helpful insights into the usage of these features, teachers and learners usually have limited access to this research. It is argued that small amounts of actual conversational English can be used imaginatively within inductive and language awareness approaches in the classroom to increase awareness and knowledge of the grammar of conversation. (Contains 32 references.) (Author/MDM)

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Grammar and the spoken language

Abstract

In this paper, we argue that language teaching which aims to foster speaking skills and natural spoken interaction should be based upon the grammar of spoken language, and not on grammars which mainly reflect written norms. Using evidence from a corpus of conversational English, we look at how four grammatical features which occur with significant frequency in the corpus are dealt with in currently popular pedagogical grammars. Our investigation shows that treatment of the selected features varies from adequate to patchy to complete absence from the grammars surveyed. We conclude that research in discourse analysis does offer some helpful insights into the usage of these features but that, in the absence of easy access to discourse analysis work and, given the mixed treatment in grammar books, teachers and learners are thrown very much back on their own resources. However, we argue that small amounts of real spoken data can yield significant evidence which can be used imaginatively within inductive and language awareness approaches in the classroom to increase awareness and knowledge of the grammar of conversation.

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Grammar and the spoken language[1]

1 Introduction

In the last couple of decades, the emphasis of English language teaching has shifted from a general notion of proficiency or competence towards skills-based approaches, and the speaking skill has been foregrounded in a way that was not so some twenty-five to thirty years ago. In parallel, the communicative approach has provided language teachers with innovative techniques and materials for fostering the spoken skills. At the same time, language courses and works of reference are increasingly advertising themselves as offering 'real English' and 'real-life communication' to the learner[2]. Equally significant and relevant is the debate over model(s) of English selected for teaching the speaking skills, whether it be southern, middle-class British English, American English, one of the 'new English' varieties or else a more neutral, culturally unattached variety of the language for intercultural communication that may not involve the use of English as a native or first language. But it may be argued, as we shall in this paper, that the models of grammar which underpin most of the laudable attempts at representing and activating the use of the spoken language are still rooted in descriptions of the grammar of written English and have failed to take on board some key

features of the grammar of interactive talk. Just as it would be questionable to base a writing skills course on grammatical statements based only on informal spoken data, in our opinion it is equally the case that spoken language instruction based solely or mainly on written language description is an unsound methodological base upon which to build. The problematic base from which we launch our argument includes ideological confusion too: so often, attempts to discuss the grammar of speech are clouded by prejudgements that many of the grammatical features observable in everyday, unplanned conversation are simply 'wrong', and are corruptions of and lapses from the standards enshrined in the scholarly grammars. What we shall argue in this paper is that written-based grammars exclude features that occur very widely in the conversation of native speakers of English, across speakers of different ages, sexes, dialect groups and social classes, and with a frequency that simply cannot be dismissed as aberration. If our speakers are 'wrong', then most of us spend most of our time being 'wrong'. Such a view of grammar is absurd and needs to be put aside from the outset.

Nowadays, computational analysis of large amounts of natural language data is relatively easy, and pioneering projects such as COBUILD at the University of Birmingham have revolutionised the way we look at naturally occurring language. And yet even the COBUILD Grammar (Collins COBUILD 1990; hereafter COB), along with other recent grammars, seems to underplay or omit common features of everyday spoken English. This may be due to a bias in some spoken language investigations towards broadcast talk, where

language is usually more measured, self-conscious, often pre-planned and more formal, and more likely to emulate written standards because of traditional perceptions of institutions such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). But since its beginnings, it must be acknowledged that the COBUILD project has made great strides in incorporating more and more spoken data into its huge corpus, and others have not been slow to follow its lead in building major corpora which are either devoted to, or include, spoken material. The British National Corpus, now under development, promises scholars access to millions of words of spoken data[3], and its published products, it is to be hoped, will have the opportunity to reflect the nature of 'real' spoken language in a way that has not hitherto been possible. In the meantime, though, language practitioners do not have to sit back and wait for the results of such vast investigations, for, with relatively small but carefully targeted corpora, much can be learnt about the spoken language, and small corpora can, in themselves, be directly exploited as a valuable resource in teaching. The fact that lexis is essentially a huge number of items whose occurrence, except for the most common function words, is relatively infrequent means that convincing corpora for major lexicographical work need to be vast, perhaps tens of millions of words. Grammar, on the other hand, consists of a small number of items and patterns frequently repeated, and thus much smaller corpora can yield regularly patterned data for grammatical analysis and exploitation in grammar teaching.

This paper bases its arguments on data taken from an interim

corpus of conversational English which forms part of a larger spoken corpus currently under development at the University of Nottingham. For the present purposes, we have taken 30 extracts of conversation averaging four minutes each', giving us a total of approximately two hours of transcribed talk and 25,000 words. In this mini-corpus, 35 different speakers are represented, 17 males and 18 females, ranging in age from 11 years to 78 years. The speakers come from across a broad social spectrum covering unskilled working-class on one side to professional people on the other. They come from widely distributed areas of the British Isles. The 30 extracts are classified by genre (see McCarthy and Carter 1994:24-38). We wish to concentrate principally on features of casual conversation, with a secondary interest in narrative, and so the mini-corpus is weighted accordingly, with other genres represented by smaller amounts of talk. For accurate cross-generic comparisons, the normalization procedure outlined by Biber (1988:75-8) can be brought into play, though in the first instance we are interested in gross frequency across all genres. The classification and amounts of data are as follows:

A: Casual conversation (bi- and multi-party informal talk with frequent turn-changes, no pre-set topics, equally distributed or shifting conversational roles). Approx. 15,000 words.

B: Narratives (stretches of talk amenable to narrative-structure analysis according to accepted models of narrative, for example Labov 1972). Approx. 5,000 words.

C: Service encounters (talk between server and served parties in shops, restaurants, etc in the negotiation of goods and services). Approx. 2,500 words.

D: Language-in-action (talk which accompanies some real-world task, for example, talk while preparing food, moving furniture, etc). Approx. 2,500 words.

The genre-classification is important, since the grammatical features we shall look at are not equally distributed across the genres, and we shall argue for a more genre-sensitive description of the spoken language as being the most useful resource for teachers and learners of English.

Our purpose in analysing the data was to see how often features of grammar occurred which, intuitively in the first stage, could be labelled as unlikely to occur in formal, written text, but which occurred frequently in the mini-corpus. We have been able to use large numbers of our own students and other seminar participants over the past year as informants to support our intuitions. When at least five occurrences of any such feature were recorded in the data, and provided the feature in question occurred across different speakers independently of sex, age, dialect group and social class, and across different extracts, searches were made in current descriptive and pedagogical reference grammars to see what coverage, if any, the features received. Our interest was in forms and structures which,

although unlikely to occur in the formal written mode, seem to pass as perfectly acceptable and grammatical in the informal spoken mode, and which any observant language learner might well expect to find information on in available published resources. We did not count aborted structures or anacolutha (changing from one structure to another mid-stream, before the first construction is complete). Much work on spoken grammatical features to date (eg Brown 1980; Lewandowska-Tomaszcyk 1990) has concentrated on starkly obvious anomalies such as anacolutha and pronoun-copying in relative clauses (eg 'That's the record that I lent it to her weeks ago'). These features are undoubtedly significant, since they are by no means isolated phenomena, but there are also other, less immediately striking features which do not seem so openly to violate traditional norms and yet which still slip through the net of grammatical description or are relegated to positions of minor importance in the descriptive apparatus, as we shall attempt to show.

In the following section, we shall take just four grammatical categories and report findings which we believe to be significant for dealing with grammar in the spoken mode in the language teaching and learning context. These categories do not by any means exhaust our list of areas offering great potential for new and revised description and pedagogy, and more findings will be published as our project develops.

2 Evidence from a selection of grammatical categories

2.1 Ellipsis

Ellipsis, the omission of elements otherwise considered required in a structure, occurs widely in the mini-corpus. Here we shall concentrate on just one kind of ellipsis, what Quirk et al (1985) (hereafter QUIRK) refer to as situational ellipsis (895ff). Situational ellipsis differs from textual and structural ellipsis in that the 'missing' items of structure are retrievable from the immediate situation. Textual ellipsis is characterised by retrievability from the text itself (either anaphorically or cataphorically), while structural ellipsis occurs when a purely structural element is omitted (eg 'I'm surprised [that] no-one told you.'). Situational ellipsis is particularly apparent in casual data. It is also notably present in language-in-action data, where not only the participants but the objects and entities and processes talked about are typically prominent in the immediate environment. There is also situational ellipsis in our service-encounter examples. It is notably absent from the narrative data, where the participants and processes of the story are usually separated in time and place from the moment of telling.

There are 70 places in the mini-corpus where one or more items of structure which would be expected in the formal written mode do not appear, but whose referents are retrievable from the immediate situation. 55 of these places are ellipses where subject pronouns are retrievable from the contextual environment. In 34 of these 55 cases, a copula or auxiliary verb is also

missing. Extract (1), from a language-in-action segment, gives the typical flavour of these types of ellipses:

(1) [members of a family in their kitchen cooking rice in preparation for a party]

1 <01> Foreign body in there
2 <02> It's the raisins
3 <01> Oh is it oh it's rice with raisins is it
4 <02> [No no no it's not
5 supposed to be [laugns] erm
6 <01> There must be a raisin for it being in there
7 <03> D'you want a biscuit
8 <01> Erm
9 <03> Biscuit
10 <01> Er yeah
11 [9 secs]
12 <03> All right
13 <01> Yeah
14 [10 secs]
15 <03> Didn't know you used boiling water
16 <02> Pardon
17 <03> Didn't know you used boiling water
18 <02> Don't have to but it's erm ... they reckon it's erm
19 quicker

Here we may observe ellipsis of the subject and verb phrase and the indefinite article in line 1, possibly either '<u>there's a</u> or

you've got a a foreign body in there', though these two interpretations by no means exhaust the possibilities (eg I can see a is an equally possible candidate for the missing items). In line 9, biscuit might minimally expect to attract a, while in lines 15, 17 and 18, the pronouns I and you are not realised. These types of pronoun and/or pronoun+operator omissions are well described in existing grammars (eg see QUIRK: ibid), although the tendency is to explain them as elements of informality. QUIRK simply states that situational ellipsis is 'restricted to familiar (generally spoken) English' (896). While it may be true that such ellipses do not occur in highly formal contexts, it is also true that the wholly informal and, by any account, 'familiar' narratives in our mini-corpus do not have them either, and so the formality/informality or familiarity distinction is anything but the whole story. We would argue that genre and context are the two key factors that mediate beyond the choice of formality/familiarity. The narrative genre, with its spatio-temporal displacement, no matter how informal or familiar, cannot easily retrieve its elements from the immediate context and thus spells out explicitly the participants and verbal operations which may be assumed to be retrievable from the environment in other, more situation-dependent forms of talk such as language-in-action, informal service encounters and casual talk where participants are face-to-face. Extract (2), from a service encounter, illustrates such retrievability:

(2) [At a dry-cleaner's. <02> is leaving a pair of trousers for cleaning]

<01> Wednesday at four be okay

<02> Er yeah that's fine ... just check the pockets a minute

Initial will from <01>'s turn and I'll from <02>'s second clause are ellipted. Our conclusion is that a proper description of a feature such as situational ellipsis, and any description claiming pedagogical usefulness, should be able to state those environments in which the types of ellipsis described do and do not occur, as well as stating the structural restrictions on what elements in the clause may and may not be ellipted.

Even on the purely structural questions of what is permissible or not in situational ellipsis, existing grammars fail to take into account some interesting features of correlation between grammar and lexis. In the mini-corpus, it is noticeable that, on many occasions, items are ellipted from what are often termed lexical phrases (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992), institutionalised expressions (Lewis 1993:94) or fixed expressions. QUIRK (899) does permit this for the definite and indefinite article with fixed and idiomatic expressions, but our data show ellipsis of other items too in the environment of fixed expressions. Nattinger and DeCarrico (op.cit.) argue that such expressions are fundamental in the construction of text, and, indeed, it is their very fixedness and cultural commonality which makes them good candidates for ellipsis; the 'missing' items can always be assumed to be known. Some examples follow, with relevant fixed expressions manifesting ellipsis underlined:

(2) <01> We did quite well out of it actually

<02> Great

<03> Mm saved a fortune

(3) <01> Yes Maureen and David was telling me you [<02> Yeah] have to get a taxi

<03> Yeah

<02> Yeah sounds as if you're right out in the sticks

(4) <01> It's lovely

<02> Good winter wine that

<01> A terrific one

<02> Put hairs on your chest that one

Once again, we would argue that any description of ellipsis in spoken language is incomplete which does not take account of this essentially culturally embedded feature of lexico-grammatical form.

Ellipsis is a good starting point for our examination of grammatical categories, for it is a feature which is described in existing published resources, but often with inadequate attention to precisely those features of the category that leap out of natural spoken data. Swan (1980) (hereafter SWAN[5]) gives very good coverage of most of the types of situational ellipsis we find in our data but makes no reference to fixed expressions or to the uneven distribution over genres, preferring formality as the determining factor and permitting ellipsis of words 'when

the meaning can be understood without them' (SWAN: sec.196; a similar quote may be found in the new edition, sec 183). Alexander (1988) (hereafter ALEX) has no separate section devoted to ellipsis; textual ellipsis is referred to with examples as and when they arise. On the kinds of everyday situational ellipsis we have referred to, ALEX is singularly uninformative. COB (399-400) concentrates on the elliptical features of questions, short replies and agreement sequences, and makes no reference to much of what we have observed in our data. Downing and Locke's grammar (1992:242) (hereafter DOWL) has only an extremely short and cursory sub-section on situational ellipsis, but at least recognises the 'institutionalised' nature of ellipsis in many everyday expressions. What we have, therefore, with regard to situational ellipsis in these major popular reference resources is an uneven and patchy treatment, even though the feature is extremely common in conversational data.

Often in such cases it is worthwhile turning to discourse-analytical research papers and relevant books, and we shall argue for other categories below that this is often the best course of action for teachers and materials writers in pursuit of accurate description. In the case of ellipsis in conversation, the two most notable recent papers are Thomas (1987) and Ricento (1987). Thomas covers auxiliary contrasting (eg 'Has she arrived?' - 'She should have by now.') and Ricento concentrates on clausal ellipsis which produces the kind of verbless short replies exemplified in COB. No paper or book we know of covers adequately the kinds of features we have found to be frequent and

significant in our data.

2.2 Left dislocation and topical information

Left dislocation is one of the names commonly used for the phenomenon where items semantically co-referential with the subject or object of the clause are positioned before the subject. An example from our data is:

(5) <01> Well Sharon, where I'm living, a friend of mine, she's got her railcard, and ...

Here a friend of mine is 'copied' in the subject pronoun she. There are five clear examples in the mini-corpus where the pronoun subject of the clause is co-referential with an initial noun phrase uttered before the main clause gets under way, as in example (5), and again here in example (6):

(6) <01> The one chap in Covent Garden who I bought the fountain pen off he was saying that he'd ...

where he copies the whole of the preceding long noun phrase. (5) and (6) fit in with Geluykens' (1992) model for left dislocation where a friend of mine in (5) would be termed the 'referent', she would be termed the 'gap' and 's got her railcard the 'proposition'. But other comparable phenomena, labelled 'quasi-left dislocation' by Geluykens (ibid:131) are also apparent in our data, and merit a closer look. For example, the initial noun

phrase may be only indirectly related to the subject, which need not be a pronoun copy, as in (7):

(7) <01> This friend of mine, her son was in hospital and he'd had a serious accident ...

Or there may be discord of person and number between the front-placed noun phrase and the main-clause subject, as in (8), but which does not seem to hamper pragmatic decoding by the listener(s):

(8) <01> That couple that we know in Portsmouth, I don't hear of her for months then ...

Alternatively, the front-placed item may be grammatically indeterminate and its relationship with the main-clause subject only topically/pragmatically coherent. For instance, in (9) below, is the underlined portion a non-finite clause, or a noun-phrase (a colloquial version of 'your saying')? The precise grammatical status seems irresolvable, and yet its pragmatic link with the the subject ('one of dad's many stories of how he escaped death during his long life') is apparently clear to the participants and unproblematic:

(9) <01> You saying about that chap with the newspaper, that, one of dad's many stories of how he escaped death [laughs] during his long life was ...

The point about these canonical examples of left dislocation and the less-clear but related examples is that they have in common the utilisation of an available 'slot' before the core constituents of the clause (Subject, Verb, Object/Complement, Adjunct, in whatever order they occur) are realised. Indeed, it would seem to be a misnomer and a misleading metaphor to talk of dislocation, for it suggests that something has been pushed out of place to a somewhat aberrant position. This metaphor may be an unfortunate legacy of a Chomskyan view of syntax[6]. We would argue that left-placed or fronted items of this kind are perfectly normal in conversational language, and are quite within their 'right place'. The phenomenon occurs especially in the narrative genre, where eight of our total of twelve examples of this type of feature occur. It is apparent that speakers use the available slot to flag a variety of items of information that will be helpful to the listener in identifying participants, in linking current topics to already mentioned ones, in re-activating old topics, and generally anchoring the discourse, offering what Quirk et al call 'a convenience to hearer' (QUIRK:1417). This is a quitessential example of 'grammar as choice', where the speaker chooses to fill an available slot for textual and interpersonal motives. The grammatical indeterminacy of what may fill the available slot, which we shall term the topic because of its proclivity to carry topic-prominent items, actually means that it is quite easy for language learners to manipulate, and experienced teachers will here recognise a common feature of learner discourse manifested in examples such as 'My father, he has two brothers and one sister', which are sometimes

lamented as examples of aberrant structure. The problem may well be better put down to lack of pragmatic motivation for using the structure rather than to any inherent ungrammaticality.

QUIRK handles the topic slot under a wider phenomenon termed reinforcement, which includes what we discuss below in 2.3, and describes it as a 'feature of colloquial style' used for 'purposes of emphasis, focus or thematic arrangement' (QUIRK:1416). COB seems to ignore the phenomenon altogether, and no heading anywhere would seem to point the student in the direction of this frequent feature of 'real' English (our claim to its frequency and normality is here doubly reinforced by Geluykens' (op.cit) data from a much larger corpus). SWAN (1980 edition) offers no guidance in connection with the topic slot except for one isolated example sentence with a topic-slot object and a copied pronoun in the main clause, under the heading emphasis (sec.201.3.a). The new edition of SWAN improves on this with several examples of what he calls 'detached fronted subjects and objects' (sec 217.3), but with no guidance as to the function of fronting other than stating that it is common. We can find no examples of the topic-slot phenomenon in ALEX, and only the briefest of mentions in DOWL, which, using Hallidayan terminology, refers to 'preposed themes' (234). Once again, the picture is inadequate and terribly patchy. We would argue that our data, with its ability to reveal genre-correlations, suggests that more salient descriptions of this phenomenon are needed, and, in the case of narrative, which is where the majority of instances occur in our mini-corpus, the topic-slot needs to be

related to basic narrative functions such as abstracts and orientations, to use Labov's (op.cit.) terms.

2.3 Reinforcement: the tail slot

Just as there seems to be an available slot at the front of the clause, which we have called the topic, so too, when all the core clause constituents have been exhausted, is there a final available space which speakers often choose to fill with different types of information. Tags occupy this slot. A typical example is the reinforcement tag (eg 'You're stupid, you are.'), which is well-covered in the sources we have surveyed. But also significantly frequent are amplificatory noun-phrases, the reverse, as it were, of the topic-slot noun phrase and a subsequent copying pronoun. Some examples follow:

(10) <01> It's lovely
<02> Good winter wine that

(11) <01> It's very nice that road up through Skipton to the Dales [<02> Yeah] I can't remember the names of the places

(12) <01> And he's quite a comic the fellow, you know
<02> [Is he [yeah

(13) [<01> is the host, <02> a dinner guest]
<01> Look get started you know putting all the bits and pieces on

<02> [Bits and pieces

on

<01> Cos otherwise they tend to go cold don't they pasta

Ten such nominal post-clause items occur in the mini-corpus. Example (13) demonstrates that they are not mutually exclusive with tags. It will also be noted that examples (10) to (13) are all in contexts where evaluative statements are being made. So too are the other six examples not quoted here. This fits in with Aijmer's (1989) study of tails, as she calls the phenomenon, and as we shall do hereafter. Tails, in Aijmer's data and in ours, tend to occur with phatic, interpersonal functions, usually in contexts of attitudes and evaluations.

Tails are therefore an important part of what may be called interpersonal grammar, that is to say speaker choices which signal the relationships between participants and position the speaker in terms of his/her stance or attitude. Tails may therefore be compared with topics and a model for the clause in conversation may be posited which offers the following structural potential:

Figure 1 [see fo.18a]

[S-tp and O-tp = subject or object in the topic slot, S-tl and O-tl = subject or object in the tail slot, RI = related item (as in example (7) above), and TAG = any of the types of English sentence-tags (see Bennett 1989). S/V/O/C/A represent the core

Figure 1

Sequence	pre-clause	clause	post-clause
Function	TOPIC	CORE	TAIL
Constituents	S-tp/O-tp/RI	S/V/O/C/A	TAG/S-tl/O-tl
Forms	NP/NFC	NP/VP/ADVP	NP/VP

clause constituents (subject, verb, object, complement and adjunct), which may be re-ordered for a variety of thematic and focusing purposes (eg object-fronting; see Hietaranta 1984). NP = noun phrase, NFC = non-finite clause, as in example (9) above, VP = verb phrase and ADVP = adverbial phrase.]

The topic and the tail are optional, but when utilised, carry important interpersonal functions, as our and others' data show. With this model, elements commonly found in conversational data need not be scattered around the descriptive apparatus or relegated to minor or marginal sections of the grammar, but achieve their proper place as items of 'real' language.

Tails do get treatment in conventional grammars. QUIRK (1417) calls them amplificatory tags. SWAN (sec 524.3; sec 472.3) gives them scant attention and puts them under 'subject tags', which is a sub-heading of 'reinforcement tags'. In ALEX (260) they receive equally short shrift and are called 'reinforcement tags'. We have been unable to find any treatment of them in COB, and if there is any, it is well hidden. DOWL (234) bring topics and tails together under the headings 'preposed and postposed themes' and give them only a passing glance, offering no information other than that, as a form of repetition, they 'allow speakers to process their information as they go along'. It is not all clear what such a cryptic statement might mean.

2.4 Indirect speech

Indirect speech is an area which, on the face of it, seems thoroughly covered in the grammars we have surveyed. Hundreds of examples abound of the type 'X said that Y', where the reporting verb (typically say or tell) is in the simple past tense and the sequence of tense rules apply to the reported clause. And yet in our mini-corpus, ten examples of indirect speech have the reporting verb in past continuous. Some examples follow:

(14) <01> I mean I was saying to mum earlier that I'm actually thinking not for the money but for the sort of fun of it really trying to get a bar or a waitressing job I was saying to you wasn't I [<02> Yeah] in the summer well over Christmas or Easter

(15) <01> Tony was saying they should have the heating on by about Wednesday

(16) <01> Where were, yeah because I was saying to Ken that you wouldn't be in a pub at twelve o'clock in Corby would you you would have to be in somebody's house

Example (3) above, it will be recalled, also contains an indirect speech report with tell in past continuous. In addition to the ten examples in the mini-corpus, we have collected a further eleven instances of indirect reports with past continuous say or tell in casual listening over the last three months. None of the illustrative sentences in any of the grammar books surveyed

contain a single example of this. All examples are with say and tell (and other reporting verbs) in simple past tense. The same is true of research articles on indirect speech. Most papers are concerned with the problem of backshift in the sequencing of tenses (eg present becomes past) when direct speech becomes indirect, for example Coulmas (1985), Comrie (1986), Goodell (1987), Huddleston (1989), Harman (1990). Even those investigations using real data fail to pick up on the use of past continuous, for example Philips (1985), Tannen (1986), Wald (1987). Notable too is Yule et al's (1992) paper, which sets out to take to task previous work on speech reporting and which shows with real spoken and written data a wide range of ways of reporting speech, but which, nonetheless, fails to note the past continuous phenomenon for indirect speech. Perhaps even more remarkable is the absence of any reference to past continuous with say and tell in the recent COBUILD Reporting Guide (Thompson 1994), which is corpus-based with hundreds of real examples of indirect speech, and which is thoroughly detailed in every other respect.

The language teacher and the interested and observant learner are thus thrown back on their own intuition in understanding examples (3) and (14) to (16). We note that say and, in example (3), tell may be used in this way, that the report may be of what the speaker him/herself said or what another said, and that past simple could have been used, but with a distinctly different force; the past simple seems to give more authority to the actual words uttered, while the past continuous seems more to report the

event of the uttering. Once again though, what is crucially important is that no examples of reported speech in the narrative extracts have past continuous, and all our examples occur in the casual genre, except one, which crops up in the middle of a language-in-action sequence. All the indirect speech reports in our narratives are introduced by reporting verbs in past simple or so-called historical present (see Johnstone 1987 on this). This may hint at a truly reporting function for past simple reporting verbs, where what someone said and what words they used (although creatively reconstructed) are considered important. On the other hand past continuous say and tell show a tendency to emphasise message content rather than form, and to report or summarise whole conversational episodes rather than individual utterances. At the moment, our conclusions must be tentative until much more data can be analysed. As a feature of spoken English grammar, it seems, past continuous reporting verbs have slipped through the grammarians' net. We would argue that this is precisely because (a) most notions of reported speech are taken from written data (including literary text) and (b) that where spoken data have been consulted, there has been an over-emphasis on oral narrative, which is simply unlikely to yield such examples if the present corpus is anything to go by, and an over-emphasis on broadcast talk, where indirect speech is likely to be of a truly quotational type, where form and content are both important.

3 Conclusions in the pedagogical context

The last points in section 2.4 concerning indirect speech underscore some central pedagogical considerations with regard to spoken English grammar. Principally we would argue that descriptions that rest on the written mode or on restricted genres of spoken language are likely to omit many common features of everyday grammar and usage, or at best to relegate them to marginal places in the description. But other considerations arise too, which we summarise as follows:

1) There is no common, agreed metalanguage for talking about the features of spoken grammar that we have focused on in this article. Our surveys of current grammars reveal a bewildering and often user-unfriendly variety of terms used to describe the features illustrated. This makes it difficult to find and compare information, even where it exists.

2) Research-minded teachers and learners <u>can</u> get a lot of information on spoken grammar from articles and books within the area of discourse analysis, but these sources are sometimes obscure and difficult of access.

3) Real spoken data is hard to come by for many teachers and learners, and the concocted dialogues of coursebooks often suffer from grammatical artificiality and do not feature the kinds of grammatical items we have looked at. Without either improved descriptions of the spoken grammar or materials which reflect it, grammar teaching within the communicative approach will always be out of kilter with the typical kinds of informal interaction

teachers hope to foster and which learners frequently hope to be able to enter into in a natural way.

4) Basing grammatical insights on corpus data does not necessarily mean that all examples in grammars and language teaching materials must always be real ones which have actually occurred. Real examples taken out of context can sometimes be so obscure that they actually confuse learners more than they help them. There is no reason at all why good concocted examples, but based on what the data tell us, should not be used for economical illustration in grammars and teaching materials. We would advocate a healthy mix of real data and carefully edited and/or concocted examples.

5) Relatively small corpora, if properly targeted, can yield recurring patterns of grammar that are not fully (or not at all in some cases) described in conventional grammars. But even small corpora may be difficult to collect in many situations, and publishers should be encouraged to publish user-friendly corpora and more real spoken language extracts as resources for teachers and learners.

6) Corpora should be carefully chosen to reflect the model of English the learners may want or need to acquire. There is little point in agonising over interactive features of informal spoken British English grammar if such features simply do not occur in the target variety. This argument goes alongside our view that there is equally little point in basing grammar teaching

exclusively on written models if the goal is to encourage speaking skills.

7) In the present situation, the best course of action would seem to be to expose learners to natural spoken data wherever possible and to help them to become observers of the grammar of talk in its natural contexts and in different genres, as advocated by Riggenbach (1990). Ellis' has claimed that learners need to learn how to observe language through tasks which foster comprehension as much as production, and an over-emphasis on production in grammar may not necessarily be the best approach in relation to the features we have described.

8) The kinds of features we have looked at may not be entirely suitable for the traditional 'three Ps' (Presentation-Practice-Production) mode of teaching, and approaches based on observation, awareness and induction may prove to be a more satisfactory way of dealing with the interpersonal subtleties of choice in matters such as ellipsis and topicalising. Our mnemonic would be the 'three Is' (Illustration-Interaction-Induction), where illustration stands for looking at real data, which may be the only option since the grammar books and current materials so often fall short, interaction stands for discussion, sharing of opinions and observations, and induction stands for making one's own, or the learning group's rule for a particular feature, a rule which will be refined and honed as more and more data is encountered. On this last point, the patchy, confusing and often inadequate treatment of the grammar of spoken langauge in

published resources may turn out to be a cue for imaginative discovery and problem-solving work in the grammar class. One only needs an initial curiosity, some real data and the feeling that there is a lot to be discovered to get started.

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Notes

1. This article is a version of a paper delivered by the authors at the Second MATSDA Conference at the University of Luton, UK in January 1994 and at TESOL, Baltimore, USA, in March 1994. A further version was presented at TESOL Greece, Athens, March 1994. The authors are grateful for the many comments offered by participants at those conferences which have helped to shape and refine the present article.

2. 'Helping learners with real English' is the slogan used to promote the Collins COBUILD reference books and materials. 'Real-life communication' has been used recently in publicity literature to promote the Look Ahead multi-level English course, published by Longman of Harlow, UK.

3. Brief background information on this project is given in the Oxford University Press English Language Teaching Catalogue for 1994, p.3.

4. There is a difficulty in controlling length of extract in that narratives and service encounters are closed episodes of unpredictable length, and many of these extracts are considerably shorter than four minutes, while the open-endedness of casual conversation means that episodes can be considerably longer before participants negotiate some sort of break or closure.

5. The figure of five occurrences is based on a projected average of once per 5,000 words of conversation, 5,000 words representing approximately 24-25 minutes of talk. Some canonical features (eg adding-clauses with which, and wh-clefts) occur with this

frequency in the mini-corpus and so the figure is claimed to have sufficient reliability for our present purpose.

5. A new edition of this work is in press and is due late 1994. We are very grateful to Michael Swan for letting us read proofs of the new edition. Where two section references are given they refer to the 1980 edition and the new edition, in that order.

6. We are grateful to Robin Fawcett of the University of Wales, Cardiff College, for offering us this view of the provenance of the dislocation metaphor.

7. Rod Ellis, MATSDA conference talk, University of Luton, UK, January 1994.

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